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NATO SEES RUSSIANS SURROUNDING CHINA

Peking's Strategic Position Called
Worse—Call for United Front
Against Soviet Stressed

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BRUSSELS, May 20 — The overall strategic situation of China has worsened over the last year despite its apparently successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Intelligence and academic specialists on the strategic triangle of China, the Soviet Union and the United States, weighing Soviet moves against China's inability to respond and American unwillingness to provide direct military aid, conclude that China's only course is to re-emphasize the call for a united front with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Sources at Atlantic alliance headquarters here say China faces the prospect of military encirclement. The most disturbing factor for China is thought to be the Soviet support for Vietnam. Soviet aid to Hanoi is now at a rate of \$3 million a day, according to one specialist, and the Russians have established a military presence on China's southern flank through the use of naval and air facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang.

Submarine Tender at Cam Ranh

A submarine tender in Cam Ranh Bay, the base built by the United States during the Vietnam War, now serves as a depot ship for Soviet submarines armed with cruise missiles and operating in the South China Sea. The submarines, one source said, are within range of the Malacca Strait, a busy commercial artery through which Middle Eastern oil reaches Japan.

The Soviet military presence in Vietnam and Soviet political support for Vietnamese policies in Laos and Cambodia have reminded China's other neighbors, the specialists said, that the Soviet Union and not China is the most significant military power on the Asian mainland.

Over the last four months, the Russians have taken steps to strengthen their ground forces along the 4,000-mile frontier with China. These forces are estimated at 45 divisions, or 450,000 men. The new element is that about half of these divisions are now at full strength, with all their weapons. These weapons include T-72 tanks, the most advanced helicopters and reinforcements in surface-to-air missiles. SS-20 medium-range missiles are said to have been installed in the Sibe-

rian Military District, with headquarters at Novosibirsk, and in the Transbaikalian Military District, centered at Chita.

Chinese Air Force Oldest in World

The ground forces are supported by 500 bombers and 1,400 fighters. The latter, guided by a radar-warning system, are judged capable of handling the obsolete bombers of the Chinese Air Force, which one source said is "the third largest and certainly the oldest" in the world.

The Russians have built up their naval strength in the Far East and show a disposition to use it on targets of opportunity.

About 10,000 men have been landed on islands in the southern Kuriles that were annexed at the end of World War II and are being claimed by Japan. According to one specialist, facilities for the accommodation of another military force are being built on Shikotan, one of the islands. The others are Iturup, Kunashir and the Habomai group. The Soviet troops are equipped with tanks, assault helicopters and ground-to-air missiles.

At Atlantic alliance headquarters, the Soviet move is considered more as a threat to China than to Japan. It has been accompanied by reinforcement of the Soviet Union's Pacific Fleet.

Eight Soviet Cruisers in Pacific

There are now eight missile cruisers and 18 missile destroyers and frigates in the fleet, which has a nominal strength of 75 submarines. The submarines and surface ships using the Vietnamese bases are drawn from this fleet. Its antisubmarine capacity has been modernized.

The Chinese military response appears to be following the dictum of Mao Zedong, who held that defense needs could be met by a nuclear strike force and a vast people's army. The Chinese have both but, as specialists say, nothing in between.

Prospects for forming a mobile, quick-reaction force are limited. Military modernization is the lowest on the list of the four modernizations on which China has embarked, specialists said. The others are in industry, agriculture and science.

The Chinese Navy may inflict losses on the Soviet Union's Pacific Fleet in inland waters. But its range is limited to that of supporting planes. The army's modern weaponry is restricted to some old tanks and a few surface-to-surface missiles left over from the period of Soviet friendship in the 1950's. The air force is described as in "desperate need of modernization."

The consensus at headquarters here is that, if the Russians were sufficiently worried by the prospect of a Chinese-American alliance, they could attack and take Manchuria, which produces half of China's oil and a third of its steel.

The Soviet Union, it is said, is so superior in nuclear weapons that it may carry out the Manchurian operation without nuclear strikes. The other side of the coin is that the Chinese may feel impelled by their weakness in conventional forces to loose nuclear weapons on cities in western Siberia and the Urals.